

eduVPN and how to deal securely with generalised remote working

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eduVPN is a VPN solution targeting the research and education community. The purpose of the solution is to provide secure access both to private institutional networks as well as public networks. eduVPN is one of the very few fully free software solution for VPN, both on server and client server sides. Different client apps have been created for Windows, Linux, macOS, Android and iOS; the code is regularly audited by external experts.

eduVPN has already been functional for a few years and it has grown rapidly: it started as a project in SURF - the Dutch National Research and Education Network (NREN) - and it is now offered by 14 National Research and Education Networks (NRENS) A few private companies outside the field of research and education also use the software.

However, apart from the Netherlands, where eduVPN is offered centrally as a managed service to many universities, the institutional access deployments remained limited in most countries. Two main factors explained the limited diffusion of eduVPN as a corporate VPN solution: 1. the needs of institutions were already served by commercial solutions with a typical duration of 3 years, 2. Despite the high costs of commercial solution, it appeared risky for many IT departments of institutions to switch to a solution which was not yet adopted by a large number of institutions.

COVID19 changed this situation. As people were sent home, the need for secure VPN access to private resources changed scale. Whereas it was typical for a middle-sized university to have hardware and licenses to serve up to 500 or 1000 concurrent users, IT departments suddenly had to look at new solutions. Very quickly, with the support of their NRENS, a high number of universities in Europe but also on other continents deployed eduVPN instances. In Africa, RENU supported for example different institutions in Uganda in order to enable them to use eduVPN. Other deployments took place in Kenya, Morocco and in South Africa.

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